MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)
(Formerly Bureau of Health)
11 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011
Phone 1-800-821-5821 / Fax 207-287-7443

**ADVISORY - Important Information **

2010PHADV003

TO: All Academic; All CDC; All City and County Health Departments; All

Healthcare; All Lab Facilities; MEMA Duty Officers; County EMA Directors; Northern New England Poison Control Center; Public Health Required; Public Health Nursing; All Public Safety and First Responders;

All RRCs; All State and Federal Agencies

FROM: Dora Anne Mills, M.D., M.P.H., Public Health Director

SUBJECT: Increase in Invasive Group A Streptococcal and STSS Infections

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PRIORITY: High

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Increase in Invasive Group A Streptococcal Infections and Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome – 2010

Background: The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) is investigating an increase in the number and severity of invasive Group A Streptococcal (GAS) infections in the first 3 weeks of January compared to previous years. Several cases reported in January, 2010 have led to Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome (STSS) and death.

Six cases of invasive GAS have been reported (ages 15-90 years), 4 of which have resulted in STSS. Two cases remain hospitalized in intensive care. Cases occurred in York, Cumberland, Oxford and Penobscot counties. Additional cases are under investigation. Three of the 4 cases with STSS have resulted in death, including a 15 year old female, an 83 year old male and a 90 year old female. In January of 2009, one case of invasive GAS was reported to Maine CDC. A preliminary count of 2009 GAS cases was 21. In 2008 there were 28 cases of invasive GAS and the five year median number of cases is 19.

GAS is a bacterium often found in the throat and on the skin and people can carry GAS and have no symptoms. Most GAS infections are relatively mild illness such as "strep throat" or impetigo. Invasive GAS disease is more severe, especially the least common forms, necrotizing fasciitis and STSS. Approximately 25% of patients with necrotizing fasciitis and more than 35% with STSS die. Although healthy people can get invasive GAS disease, persons at risk include those with chronic illnesses (cancer, diabetes, chronic heart or lung disease); persons with skin lesions (chicken pox, cuts, surgical wounds); persons on immunosuppressive therapy; the elderly; adults with a history of alcohol abuse or injection drug use.

Invasive GAS infections are seasonal, peaking December through April. The spread of GAS can be prevented by good hand washing, especially after coughing and sneezing and before preparing foods or eating. Persons with sore throats diagnosed as strep throat should stay home from work, school, or day care until 24 hours after taking antibiotics.

Recommendations: Health care providers are encouraged to perform culture testing and consider prompt antibiotic treatment for patients presenting with symptoms of GAS and STSS. Because invasive GAS infections can progress rapidly, providers are encouraged to be familiar with early signs of STSS:

- Fever
- Abrupt onset of generalized or localized severe pain, often in an arm or leg
- Dizziness
- Influenza-like syndrome
- Confusion
- A flat red rash over large areas of the body (occurs in 10% of cases)

All cases of suspected invasive GAS and STSS should be reported by phone to the Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821. Information on GAS and STSS is available at: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/groupastreptococcal_g.htm